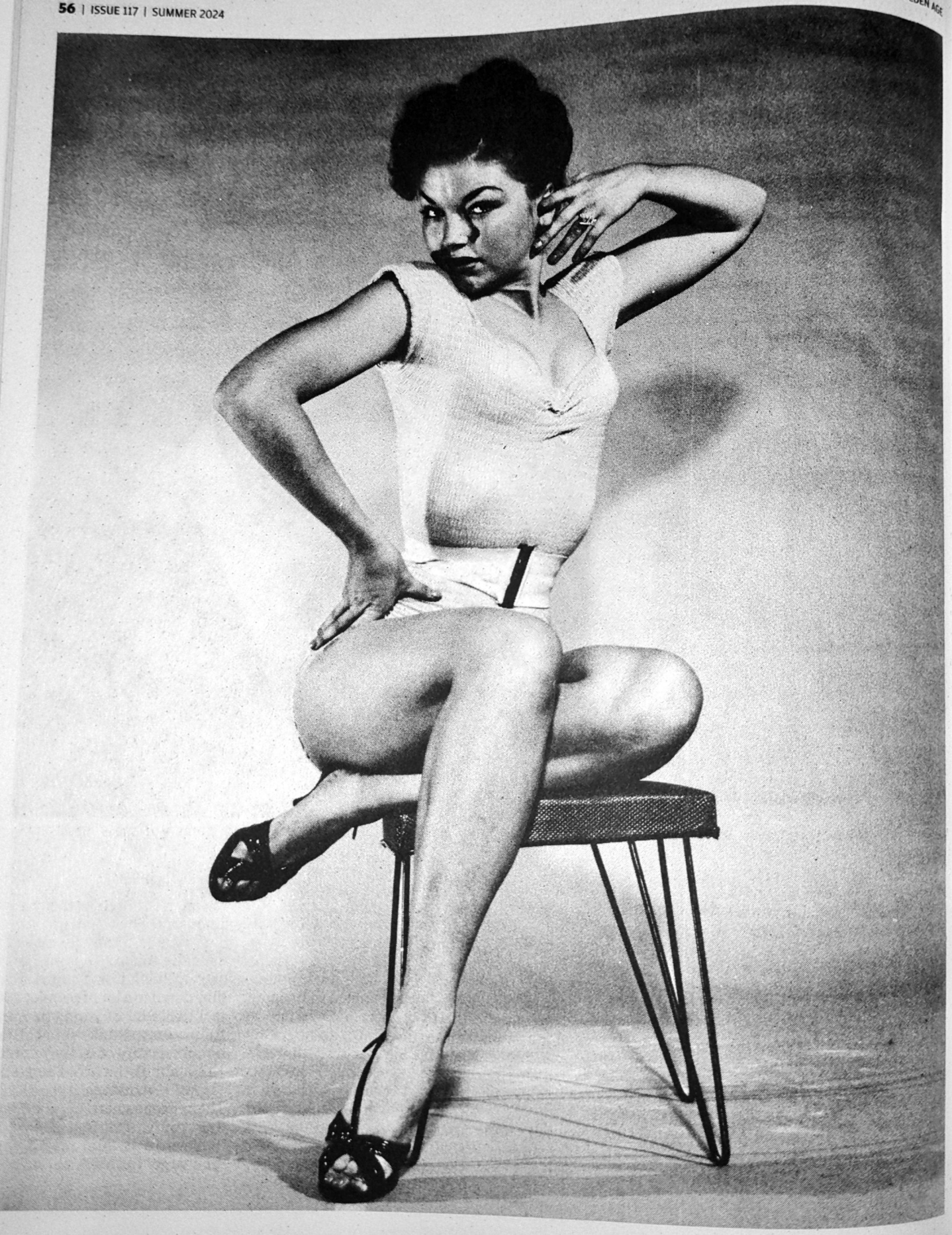


Shirley Kilpatrick

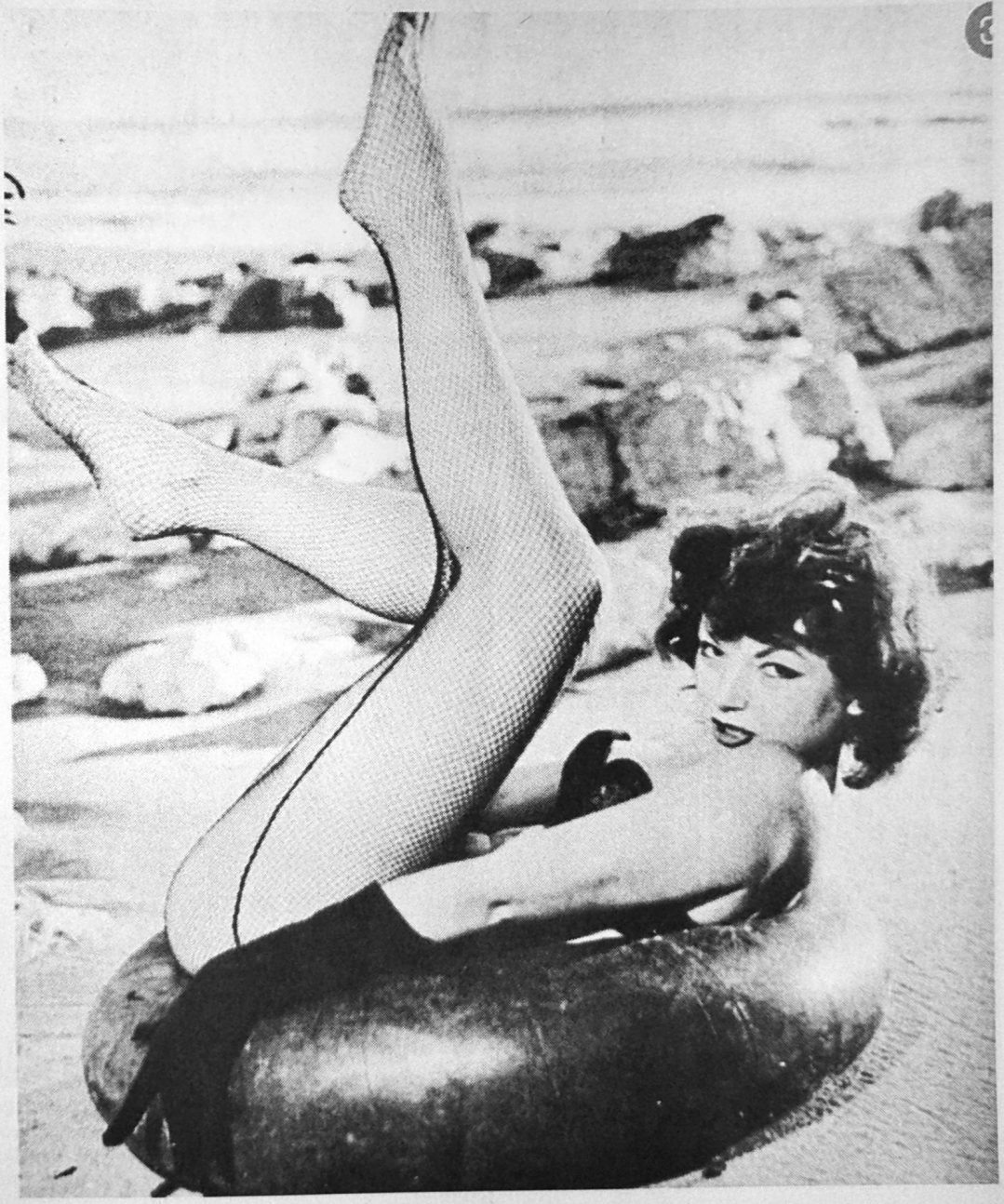
and The Astounding She-Monster

SAMUEL CLAESSON

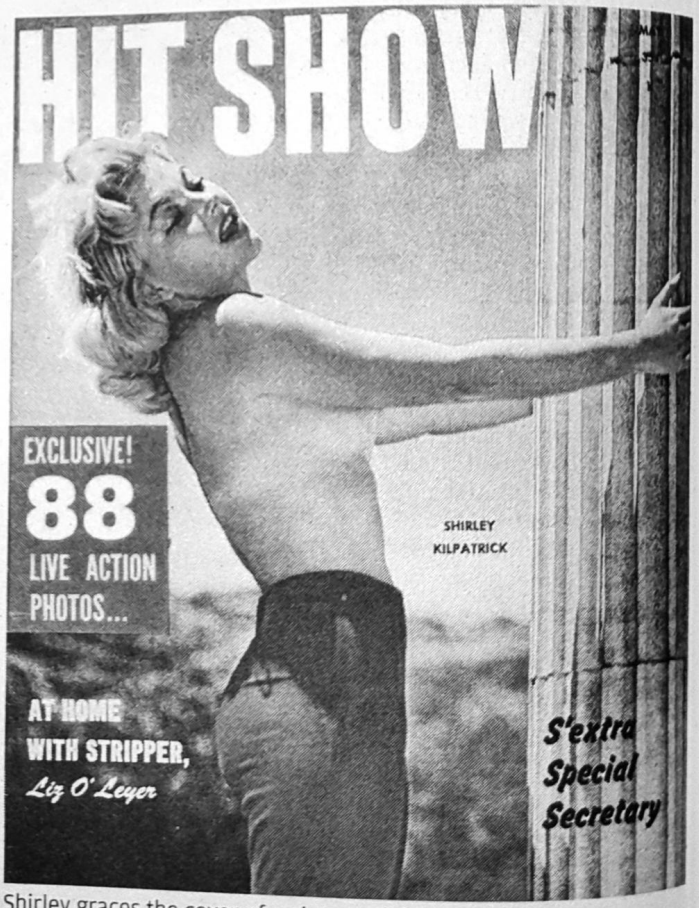
The whereabouts and fate of Shirley Kilpatrick, known for starring as *The Astounding She-Monster* (1957), has been an unsolved mystery for decades. There have been historians who believed she was actually actress Shirley Stoler, while others thought she lived in a trailer park in Washington. I spent months searching for her before realizing that her surname was actually "Abbott." That led me to find her death certificate. After conversations with her ex-husband and daughter, I pieced together the life of this gorgeous blonde—sometimes redheaded—lady who portrayed one of the most iconic characters in cinema history.

Shirley Jean Abbott was born on October 4, 1935, in Los Angeles, to Wilbur C. and Ruth E. Abbott (née Lingren). Wilbur was a veteran of the Armed Forces and a salesman from Alabama, while Ruth was an immigrant from Sweden. Shirley attended Glendale High School, but dropped out at age 16 to marry army vet Robert W. Kilpatrick. Their turbulent marriage ended two years later, and Shirley began her modeling career shortly thereafter.

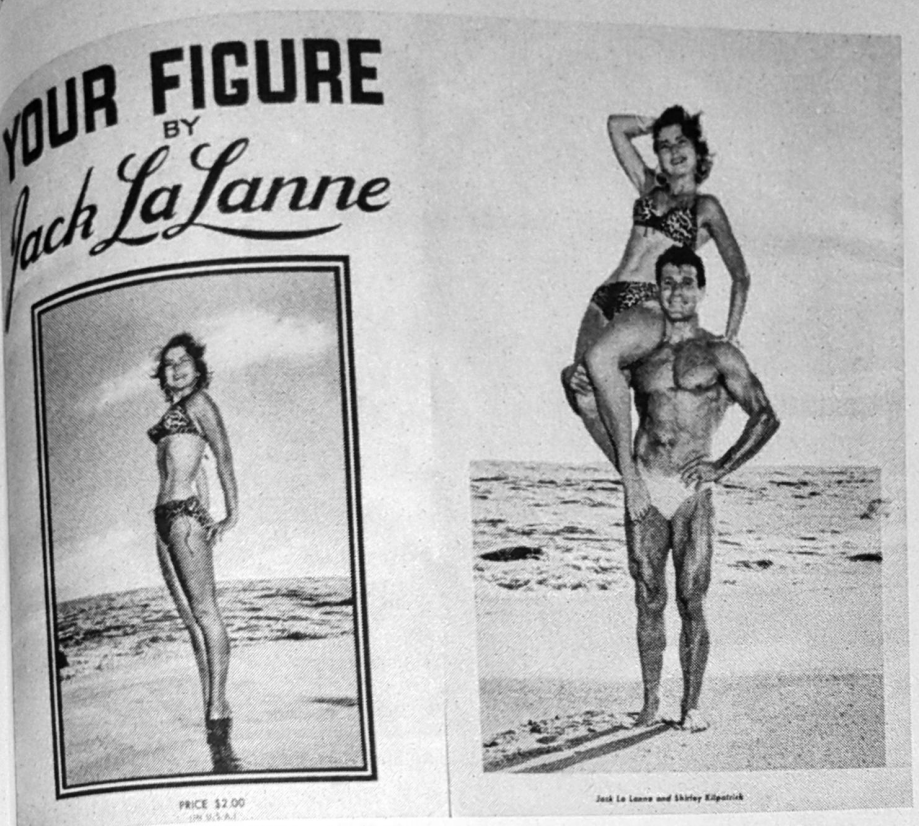
On September 7, 1953, her sensational figure and warm personality earned her the title of Miss Bay Beach. This was followed by various modeling gigs that included pictorials in Your Figure by Jack LaLanne, People Today, and Picture Scope. She was popular among male read-



Shirley Kilpatrick, Lizabeth Scott, Hugh Sanders and John Payne in Silver Lode (1954).

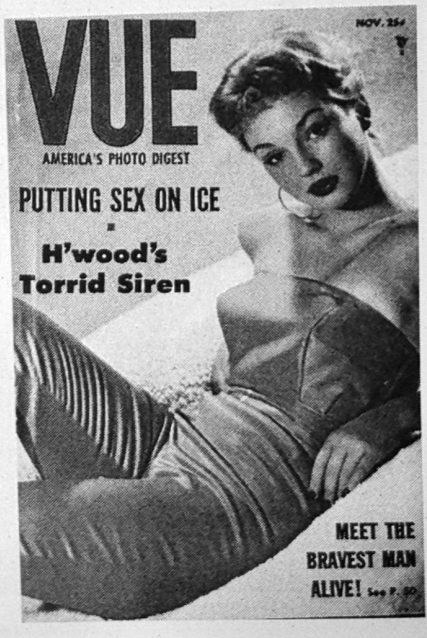


Shirley graces the cover of a vintage girlie mag.



In 1953, Shirley was pictured in Your Figure by Jack LaLanne, a health and fitness booklet.

Shirley performs in The Gene Krupa Story (1959).



ers due to her curvaceous figure and appearance that resembled Marilyn Monroe. She got an onscreen part in *Silver Lode* (1954) as a bridesmaid, a role that was significantly reduced because she wasn't a trained actress. Continuing with her lucrative modeling career, Shirley appeared in provocative magazines like Gala, Chicks and Chuckles, and Modern Man.

The movie that solidified her status as an icon among fans of the sci-fi genre was her starring role in *The Astounding She-Monster* (1957). Filming took four days on a low budget. She and the movie's director, Ronald V. Ashcroft, would often joke about giving her alien character lines in the script. Halfway through the film's completion, Shirley's skin-tight costume tore in the back. She was told to walk backwards in the remainder of her scenes, as the producer couldn't afford

Shirley in a close-up as the Astounding She-Monster.

Shirley in The Astounding She-Monster (1957).

A CREATURE FROM BEYOND THE STARS
EVIL... BEAUTIFUL... DEADLY...!
THE ASTOUNDING SHE-MONSTER
ROBERT CLARKE · KENNE DUNCAN · MARILYN HARVEY
JEANNE TATUM · SHIRLEY KILPATRICK · EWING BROWN
Story and Screenplay by FRANK HALL · Produced and Directed by RONNIE ASHCROFT · A HOLLYWOOD INTERNATIONAL Production
An AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL Release

another costume. Her co-star Robert Clarke would say years later that "Shirley was big in the behind and big in the bosom. As an actress, she didn't do a lot and she didn't have to. She had all that other stuff going for her." The movie is considered a cult classic among contemporary audiences.

After filming concluded, she married actor and shipping heir Parker Eggleston. Together, they had a daughter named Karen Eggleston. Unfortunately, their marriage didn't last. Despite Parker begging her to reconsider, Shirley wanted to continue pursuing her fading career and filed for divorce. According to their daughter, Parker said to Shirley, "I'll always be here if you want to come back."

As a dancer, she got an uncredited role in *The Gene Krupa Story* (1959). After marrying Antonio Maldarella, Shirley retired from the industry. They lived on Edgecliffe Drive in Los Angeles, divorcing in 1962. According to Antonio, Shirley was reportedly "loony and experimented with heroin." She became a property manager, but continued to earn a steady income from her older photographs which continued to be published elsewhere. After a short-lived marriage to carpenter Donald Coffman, which ended in divorce after she shot him in self-defense, she wed Joseph Settle. The couple lived in Las Vegas, where Joseph owned a nursery. Shirley grew tired of being a housewife, however, and began writing for the Las Vegas Review-Journal instead.

She studied metaphysics and became a psychic. According to her daughter, Shirley did her best acting in her new career. She dressed professionally, wore glasses, and vigorously rehearsed to seem as professional as possible when using a Ouija board for her clients, many of whom were wealthy. As she delved into this trade, her mental health rapidly deteriorated. The alleged abuse she suffered from her husband didn't help. While staying at a hotel in Las Vegas during a trial separation, she overdosed on barbiturates on March 19, 1971. Days later, she was buried in Las Vegas' Woodlawn Cemetery. She is survived by her daughter Karen, who lives on a ranch in Kentucky.